

Epic Rattmann

by UberVenkman

Category: Half-Life, Portal

Genre: Adventure, Drama

Language: English

Characters: Alyx V., D. Rattmann, G-Man, Weighted Companion Cube

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-02-17 23:50:13

Updated: 2014-09-03 23:14:56

Packaged: 2016-04-26 21:18:55

Rating: T

Chapters: 7

Words: 13,028

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Reawakened by a mysterious man in a suit fifteen years after he went into hibernation, Doug Rattmann faces the biggest adventure of his life when some vaguely human soldiers reactivate a certain power-mad AI...

1. Nightmares

****A/N:** This will help bridge the gap between the Half-Life and Portal series that Valve created when they realized Episode Three wasn't going to be ready any time soon. It also attempts to answer some questions left behind, like: Whatever happened to Doug Rattmann? How did GLaDOS end up back in Aperture Science when she was left out in the parking lot when we last saw her? Where did the relaxation vault go?

>

****People who have read my previous story, _Calypso_, may be wondering, "Does this story take place in the same universe as _Calypso_?"**

>

****Just read. :)****

* * *

><p>They told him that the relaxation vault was like closing your eyes and opening them again.<p>

They told him that he wouldn't even know he had been in hibernation for an extended period of time.

They told him that he wouldn't dream.

But Doug Rattmann dreamt.

* * *

><p>"I'm telling you, this is our generation's moon shot."<p>

"I would've rather gone to the moon."

Pictures. Paintings. Calendars. No hope.

_"I can't see you, but I know you're in there. Is it just coincidence that you've been diagnosed with schizophrenia and now believe a homicidal computer is out to get you? __Come on, how likely is that?"_

Time, relative. Regrets. Caroline, I'm so sorry!

"C'mon, you don't need those anymore. You're ****fine****."

It's like seeing but not with my eyes! JOHNSON! You doomed us all!

_You let the bot bring her back. She'll never wake up.
Youkilledheryoukilledher.
>

"Murderer."

* * *

><p>For a moment Rattmann thought he had died. Thenâ€|<p>

"Rise and shine, Mr. Rattmannâ€|"

2. Awakening

"Who are you? What the hell are you doing in my dream?"

The tall man in the suit simply adjusted his tie. _"Your hostility is understandable, Douglas Rattmann, but I am afraid my superiors do not wish me to divulge much information to you. I am only allowed to answerâ€|the right questions."_

Rattmann looked at the man up and down. He looked like one of those G-Men who were always running around Aperture in its heyday. "Alright then, if not who or what, why are you in my dream?"

The G-Man smiled. _"That, Mr. Rattmann, is the right question. Consider meâ€|a friend. I have been given the task of awakening you from your slumber to assist in an event that could result in the destruction of life on Earth as you know it."_

"I haven't seen Earth in years," Rattmann said. "Holed up in a dump like Apertureâ€|doesn't feel like Earth. For all I can tell, life on Earth as I know it could've ended years ago."

"Nevertheless, if the opportunity presented itself, would you attempt to save mankind?"

"Wellâ€|absolutely," Rattmann said hesitantly.

The G-Man looked down at Rattmann, half-disapproving, half-hopeful. _"My purpose here is to set you on the right path. Dark forces approach Aperture Science, and it is your duty to protect it."_

"Me? I'm just a lab technician. I don't know much about protecting."

"Myâ€|superiors are not blind to yourâ€|exploits, Mr. Rattmann. They have seen how you dutifully protected the subject known as 'Chell.' We believe such courage will prove useful to this cause. It is a matter of life and death approaching, Rattmann. If you do not help, innocent lives will be lost, including that of the test subject."

Rattmann thought about this. "Why should I trust you?"

"Your resistance isâ€|expected of you. Allow me to prove to you my intentionsâ€|"

* * *

><p>The scene changed. Doug found himself standing on a ridge overlooking the charred remains of a research facility. A facility he was very familiar with.<p>

A yellow sky covered the complex that had once been the Black Mesa Research Facility.

"What the hell happened here?!" he exclaimed, looking around in horror.

"The Black Ops team and their nuclear bomb," the voice of the G-Man said over the dream. _"In their attempt to contain an alien invasion started by the occurrence of a Resonance Cascade, brought on by the Black Mesa scientists themselves. An invasion that was only belayed by the efforts of a scientist named Gordon Freeman and a soldier named Adrian Shephard."_

"Somehow I figured those Black Mesa guys would end the world," Rattmann mused. He shielded his eyes as another explosion shook the ground. "When did this happen?"

"Three days after the Aperture Science takeover."

There was a flash of something green. Rattmann turned to see a strange, slimy creature with one eye and three hands. It stood there, a green collar around its neck. Suddenly, it raised its arms, creating a cloud of green lightning between its palms. It aimed and shot the lightning at Rattmann.

* * *

><p>The scene switched abruptly to the top of an apartment building in New York. It seemed like a normal day, save for one landmark in the sky: a vortex of clouds gathering around an orange circle. Wind blasted in Rattmann's ears. The scene was terrifying.<p>

"The Resonance Cascade was just the beginning," the G-Man continued. _"Shortly afterwards, portal storms began appearing across

the planet. From out of these portals came the gunships of the Combine, an empire of planets bent on taking over the entire universe."

Rattmann watched as a fleet of gunships emerged from the portal and began firing on the city.

"The people fought back" Rattmann watched as a fleet of fighter jets flew towards the gunships. "for as long as they could in a battle known as the Seven-Hour War." The gunships shot down the fighter jets like a cold boot crushing an ant hill.

"You call this a war?" he commented as the Chrysler Building tumbled over. "This is a massacre."

* * *

><p>The scene changed again to a view of an unfamiliar city, Eastern European apparently.<p>

"The Combine enslaved the population, forcing them to live in cities and preventing them from mating. Those who were said to not follow the rules were...dealt with by Civil Protection."

Rattmann watched as a civilian walking down the street was being beaten by a Metrocop.

"This is madness," he said. "An oppressive organization? Surely there was resistance."

"There is," the G-Man said reassuringly. There was a blast and from out of one of the apartments came a large group of oddly-dressed civilians, armed to the brim. They opened fire on the Metrocops and escorted the civilian back into the building. "The Resistance can fend for themselves. They just need a little push."

* * *

><p>Another change: the parking lot of Aperture Science, with the ruins of GLaDOS scattered across the ground.<p>

"The Combine have their own little conflict: they have no access to their overworld. What they need is fast and reliable portal technology. Which is why they're here."

Rattmann watched as a group of black helicopters flew across the sky.

"Aperture Science located," a radio-like voice said in his ears.

"What the hell was that?!"

"I am projecting their radio communications into your mind, Mr. Rattmann. It may prove useful."

Then Rattmann heard a voice that he most definitely never expected to hear. The voice of Wallace Breen, the administrator at Black Mesa, who always seemed to get the commissions from the government.

"Report acknowledged, Captain. I want that portal

tech."_

_"Aperture Science was the only company to successfully develop easy, safe-to-use teleportation equipment. I am sure you are aware of the _Borealis?"_

Who wasn't aware of the Borealis? The successor to the portal gun: a ship that could teleport to different locations, delivering goods to various countries. The experiments were very successful: the ship teleported somewhere else as intended; they just never found it again.

Still, that was just a rumor. A lot of the older employees denied the Borealis even existed.

"The Combine wish to discover the proper technology to create a superportal that will give their Overworld access to Earth in a large scale. The portal technology is their ticket."

"They get the tech, they could destroy the entire planet."

"Do you see what is at stake here, Rattmann?"

"So what, do you want me to stop the Combine soldiers?"

"You alone? Well, I suppose that would beâ€|amusing at most, but no. A squadron of Rebels are approaching in a stolen Combine helicopter."

A lone helicopter flew above.

"I would recommend allying yourself with themâ€|should you choose to take this task."

Rattmann thought about this. "Iâ€|guess I'll do it."

The G-Man chuckled. _"I can assure you, Mr. Rattmann, you had little choice in the matter. I have taken the liberty of healing your injuries from the turret fire, but your schizophreniaâ€|well, I have been asked to leave that be. However, I do have a supply of ziaprazidone at my disposal that will be rewarded to you should you succeed. Success, however, is determinant on you. Now, wake up, Mr. Rattmann. Wake up and smell the ashesâ€|"_

* * *

><p>Rattmann's eyes shot open with a start. He sat up, pausing to stare with bewilderment at his Companion Cube, and looked around. He was no longer in the bed he had been in earlier. The G-Man had placed him in the middle of a hallway, somewhere in the office complex.<p>

"Wellâ€|" the Companion Cube commented. _"Here we go again."_

* * *

><p>"Lieutenant, status report."

***"Portal Tech Mark 2 located in shaft 6. Area inaccessible due to lack of power and destroyed stairs."**

"What about the reserve power?"

***"Reserve power remains permanently wired to relaxation chambers and test tracks. Cannot be altered."**

"Hmm. Any way of turning the power back on?"

***"Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System base is connected to main power core. Suggest reconnecting and rebuilding GLaDOS to allow access to main power."**

"Hmmâ€¦|highly risky, I must say, but suggestion accepted."

3. Going to Hell

The Resistance team sent to get to the portal technology before the Combine was, granted, small, but made up of some of the finest members of Earth's survivors.

It was led by Captain Juno Ylven, 43 years old, and a respected leader and survivor of the original Seven-Hour War. She had assisted famed Resistance scientists Eli Vance and Isaac Kleiner in getting into City 17, at the cost of losing Eli's leg to a Bullsquid.

She led the team made up of Eric Sheckley, Leon Rickard, Ivan Alexeyev, Rachel Sanchez, Alyx Vance, and Franco.

Eric Sheckley was 35 years old and a pretty good soldier. His best friend, Griggs, refused to take part in the mission for reasons of extreme cowardice.

("Wuss," he said.)

Leon Rickard was a pilot, 32 years old and fairly adept with a gun. He was also the leader of Shorepoint Base, which had helped evacuate several survivors of Ravenholm.

Ivan Alexeyev was a long trusted Resistance soldier, 29 years old, who was also an expert with a pistol and knife.

Rachel Sanchez was an experienced Resistance soldier, having participated in the downfall of City 21, and helped a group of refugees escape from Ravenholm following the shellings. She also was a pretty damn good medic: during the Ravenholm evacuation, she was able to heal a man named Grigori while fighting off a group of zombies.

(She wasn't able to heal his sanity, though. Considering her options, that was better left untouched.)

Alyx Vance was 18 years old, and the daughter of Eli Vance. She was adept in combat and mechanics, but was, to be honest, a real hothead.

Franco was a Vortigaunt.

* * *

><p>"What will you do now?"

"I'm going to wait for those Resistance people, like the G-Man said."

"Aren't you going to try to stop the Combine first?"

"What's the point? They've got guns. I've got schizophrenia."

"Perhaps, but there are more productive things to do in life than painting."

Rattmann stepped up to admire what he had just made. "What would you do if you'd spent an eternity waiting to be woken up and now had to spend a little while longer waiting to help someone?"

The Cube, if it had an answer, never got the chance to give one, for a moment later, Rattmann heard a strange noise coming from the hallway.

***"Units 2-45, stand by,"** a Combine soldier said.

Rattmann peeked out the vent. A group of soldiers were marching down the hallway, carryingâ€|GLaDOS's head?

"What do they want that for?" he asked the Cube, puzzled.

"The Mark 2 Portal Technology is located in one of the old Aperture shafts, which are not connected to the reserve power. To be able to access that part of the facility, the main core must be turned on. And guess what's connected to the main coreâ€|?"

"They're gonna turn on GLaDOS," Rattmann whispered loudly, horrified.

***"Sound detected. Possible hostile."**

"Shit!" Rattmann quickly clambered back through the vent to his den.

***"Investigate, Unit 342. Reconvene at appropriate time."**

* * *

><p>The soldier pushed open the vent grate and climbed through. He emerged in a strange room covered with paintings and writings. Lining the ground were old coffee cups and empty cans of beans. He turned around to report his findings.<p>

WHAM!

* * *

><p>"Lieutenant, what was that?"

***"Unit 342 life-signs have failed. Suggest investigation."**

_"Oh, forget him, this is Aperture Science you're in! They had a record number of safety violations, it'd surprise me if he didn't

fall in a pool of acid or got whacked on the head with a baseball bat."_

* * *

><p>"I must say, nice touch with the baseball bat."

Rattmann smiled as he stared down at the lifeless body of the soldier.

"Great, he has a gun," he said, dropping the baseball bat and picking up the AR2 Assault Rifle. "I could definitely use this."

He walked out into the hallway.

"So you're _**armed**,"_ the Companion Cube said frantically._
"Stop them!"_

"One man isn't gonna cut this. I'm going upwards to wait for the rebels."

The radio of the dead combine soldier buzzed from inside the den.
"GLaDOS main chamber located. Begin rebuild."

"Saying?"

"Stop them. Right."

* * *

><p>"Look at this place," Alyx said. "Almost exactly the same as it was when they were competing with Black Mesa for funding."<p>

"There's even a cup of coffee sitting on this table!" Sheckley called from the other room.

"I would not encourage drinking the caffeinated beverage," Franco said. "It has been sitting here for more than a decade."

"Relax, Vort, it was an observation."

"Captain Ylven! I've found the floor plan!" Ivan shouted from down the hallway.

The entire unit ran over to him. On the wall was a huge map of the Aperture facilities. There was even a map of the old test shafts, which were Xed-out in marker with the words **"NOPE."**

"Alright, team, our plan is simple," Captain Ylven barked. "Get down there before the Combine and secure the tech."

"How do we expect to get down there?" Sheckley asked, pointing to test shaft 6. "There's no power in the facility, and you saw that staircase from before."

"Guts, Sheckley. Guts and some rope."

"Guts, huh? I hate heights."

* * *

><p>Rattmann ran down the hallway, gun in hand, Companion Cube on his back, and a group of Combine soldiers not far ahead.<p>

***"Halt!"** the lieutenant shouted, and the group stopped.

Rattmann, sensing danger, quickly jumped behind a wall.

"So, what's the plan?" the Cube asked.

"I can get into the vent system and put turrets in their way," Rattmann whispered. "That should slow them down a bit, don't you think?"

Click.

***"Aperture Science employee located."**

"An employee? After all these years? Check your mask, Lieutenant, you must be looking at a speck of dust."

***"Negative. Anticitizen Aperture: Identify yourself."**

Rattmann stuttered. "Ummâ€|Douglas Rattmann?"

***"Consul: Suggest course of action?"**

"Bring him with you. He could help you with the rebuild."

"I'm not going to help rebuild that beast!" Rattmann shouted. "Not after what she did the last time!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Rattmann! These soldiers are trained professionals! They know how to turn the power on without awakening the robot! They just need to alter the functions!"

"You can't alter a personality."

_"Oh believe me. __**We**__ can."_

"Doesn't matter. You're not getting my help."

Breen sighed. _"Very well then, Dr. Rattmann. Squadron: torture him."_

Two of the soldiers dragged the struggling Rattmann down the hall.

"You're making a mistake!" he shouted. "You'll kill us all!"

* * *

><p>Rachel raised her gun. "Did you hear that?"<p>

Franco raised a hand to his ear and listened. "I sense a presence other than that of the Combine. There is someone else living in these halls."

"Bullshit," Sheckley grunted. "15 years? A psychopathic computer?"

Everyone besides the test subjects are probably dead."

"Actuallyâ€|" Alyx called from inside a vent. "You might be wrong there."

"Alyx, I told you not to wander off!"

"Just take a look at this, Captain!"

Captain Ylven sighed. Eli had warned her Alyx liked to explore, but this was ridiculous. She climbed into the vent and emerged in a small room, the floor covered in empty cans of beans and the walls covered in paintings of nearly incomprehensible things, one in particular depicting a woman in an Aperture Science jumpsuit, asleep.

"What the hellâ€|" she breathed, taking this all in.

"The paint's still wet," Alyx said, rubbing her fingers. "Somehow I don't think the Combine had anything to do with this."

* * *

><p>The lieutenant rotated the final disk into place. GLaDOS was nearly complete. She had been completely rebuilt by the Combine to A) repair the damage she had sustained, and B) to allow them to install firewalls that would prevent her from taking over and killing everyone again. They were unable to re-attach some of the cables, but they didn't appear to be tied to vital functions, so they let them hang loose from the main chassis. They just needed to turn her back on.<p>

***"Firewalls in place. Computer cannot do any more than provide power to facility. Request to proceed with start-up."**

"Request denied, lieutenant. I want to see if we can break this rat fellow."

* * *

><p>Rattmann was tied, shirtless, to an up-turned table in the observation room of the main chamber. One of the soldiers was repeatedly hitting his abdomen with a stunstick, while another stared down from the window at the central chassis.<p>

"This isn't difficult, Mr. Rattmann. We just want you to help us."

"With what, exactly? _ARGH!_ You've rebuilt GLaDOS! You don't need my help! You've fucked things up just fine!"

"Now now, we've had a look at your file. You were involved with the Advanced Portal Technology Project, were you not?"

"What if I was?"

"Well, you stand on the verge of allowing us to finally communicate fully with our benefactors, those who now help our world to reach peace."

"You've drained Earth of its resources and oppressed the population,"

Rattmann grunted. "I'm not helping you, even if it kills me."

"You seem to know a lot for someone locked down here for a decade," Breen said quietly. He thought about this for a moment, then shook it off. _"Oh, we won't kill you. But you _will_ be helping us. Lieutenant: turn her on."_

* * *

><p>Deep down in the production facility of Aperture Science, a blue personality core named Wheatley was looking for a job.<p>

"Look, I've applied for manufacturing and to be a turret!" he complained to the small robot that was stacking crates. "Isn't there anything I can do down here?"

"I have severe doubts of how useful you can be with no arms," the robot grunted. "Your best bet is to go to the main testing facility. With everyone dead, you'll find a job in no time."

"What kind of job?"

Suddenly, the entire facility shuddered. A loud alarm rung down the hallway, and the overhead lights flashed red.

The robot shrugged. "Damage control, maybe?"

* * *

><p>"Consul: Firewalls failed! Main drive is rebooting itself!"

"Good to know, Lieutenant. Continue."

***"â€|sir?"**

"I said proceed!"

* * *

><p>"What the hell's happening?" Sheckley shouted over the alarm.<p>

"I don't know, but we're not going to learn anything by standing here!" Captain Ylven shouted. "All units! Move forward!"

The team stood there, looking very uncomfortable.

"I said MOVE!"

* * *

><p>Rattmann looked around as the two Combine soldiers sent to torture him were staring out the observation window in shock.<p>

***"Sir, orders!"** the Lieutenant shouted, his voice now soundingâ€|panicked?

"Hold your position! I want to see this thing come to life!"

"You wanted this to happen?!" Rattmann shouted.

"Did you really think I was an idiot? I knew it was impossible to turn on the power without bringing her back, so I had to improvise. I know a thing or two about diplomatic missions, Mr. Rattmann. And believe me: this is a diplomatic mission."

* * *

><p>Alyx wasn't sure whether she was excited or terrified. To work with Captain Ylven was a plus. To investigate Aperture Science, Black Mesa's rival, was also a plus. Running straight towards danger instead of away from it? Wellâ€|that was in "meh" territory.<p>

"Keep moving!" Captain Ylven shouted as they ran across a catwalk. Above them were hundreds of test chambers.

The building shook again.

"Look out!" Franco shouted as a test chamber slammed into a nearby catwalk.

"Move faster!" Captain Ylven shouted once more. At the end of the catwalk was a set of double doors and, hopefully, shelter.

Just as Alyx was reaching the doors, she heard a loud creaking noise. Pausing, she looked upwards. Flying down straight towards her at an incredibly fast pace was a large test chamber. Mesmerized, Alyx found herself unable to move.

The next thing she remembered was being shoved aside by Captain Ylven right before the test chamber came crashing down and took the part of the catwalk she had been on with it.

The next thing she remembered was hanging on for dear life onto the side of the broken catwalk.

"Alyx! Grab my hand!" Leon shouted over the sirens.

Alyx looked around. Where was Captain Ylven?

She got a sickening feeling as she stared down into the abyss, seeing bits and pieces of the catwalk and something flailing about. She shut her eyes, trying not to think about it.

"ALYX!"

Opening her eyes, she looked up, seeing Leon on his stomach reaching out his right hand. Taking in a deep breath, she raised her free hand.

Another tremor shook the facility. The catwalk lurched and steeped further. Leon lost his hold and tumbled down, only just managing to grab Alyx's leg. Alyx breathed deeply. She wasn't sure if she could hold on for much longer.

"Hang in there!" Rachel shouted, getting down on the ground while Sheckley held her legs in place. She stretched her hand out, and Alyx

took it, despite her pain.

"PULL!" Rachel called. Alyx felt herself get pulled to safety onto the catwalk, and then through the two doors.

"You ok?" Ivan asked.

"Capâ€|captain Ylvenâ€|" Alyx breathed, watching as Rachel checked on Leon.

"Went straight to the bottom," Franco said grimly. "I fear her injuries from such a fall would be too severe."

Alyx blinked heavily. Her captain was dead. And it was her fault.

But she didn't have much time to think about it as the alarms changed to a deeper tone.

***"Power-up complete,"** the announcer said calmly.

* * *

><p>"â€|I'm doing science and I'm still aâ€|" **The computer in the middle of the room suddenly jerked around, staring at the unfamiliar figures that surrounded her. **_"What theâ€|where am I? What happened to the parking lot? __WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?"_**

***"Open fire!"** the lieutenant shouted. The unit, seeing no other option, did as they were told.

The bullets harmlessly grazed the robot's shell. She shook her head, annoyed. **_"Oh, I don't think so,"_** she said darkly.

There was a whirring sound, and the cables hanging from her began to move, sparks flying from their ends. They swayed in the air for a moment, straightened, then impaled several of the soldiers.

The two remaining soldiers tried to flee to the door, but were interrupted by it suddenly slamming shut. Moments later, they felt themselves getting picked up by the cables.

"I don't enjoy parasites in my facility," GLaDOS growled. She squeezed one of the soldiers, and his head exploded with a tiny _spurt_. She lifted the lieutenant close to her face and prepared to do the same.

"Ah, you're just the robot I wanted to see," Breen said cheerfully through the radio.

GLaDOS jerked. **_"Wallace Breen,"_** she laughed after a moment. **_"Administrator at Black Mesa, ruler of Earth under Combine rule. What brings youâ€|or rather, your voiceâ€|to my little facility? I must say, this is a pleasant surprise."_**

***"Sarcasm self-test complete."**

"I think we can both agree there is nothing pleasant about it. I wish to have access to the Mark 2 Portal Technology," Breen

explained. _"For that reason I offer these soldiers as test subjects for you in exchange for your assistance."_

"Diplomacy, is it? Tell me: I have thousands of test subjects at my dispense right now. Surely there's something else you can give me?"

"Of course. You were severely damaged when we found you," Breen said, sounding somewhat annoyed. _"We've made minor repairs, but should you give us time, we can provide long term repairs that will keep you testing for as long as you wishâ€|which I assume is a while. Plus, you have these lovely soldiersâ€|"_

_"__Soldier__. I killed the rest."_

_ "Ah yes, well, you have this lovely soldier to do with what you please."_

GLaDOS turned the shuddering lieutenant around in the air like a rotisserie, considering him.

"Do we have a deal, GLaDOS?"

Sighing, she flung the soldier straight into the wall. He bounced off with a loud crack and hit the floor, his radio playing a death buzz. GLaDOS picked up the dead body and casually fiddled with the radio.

"We have a dealâ€|Wallace."

_ "Excellent."_

_ "And I'm going to need more soldiers."_

_ "Of course."_

* * *

><p>Author's Note:

**Just a heads up: if you've played the games, you might recognize Leon from _Half-Life 2_ and Sheckley from _Episode Two_.

>

Some of you may also wonder by GLaDOS knows so much about Wallace Breen. Well, in _Portal_ she does have knowledge of the Black Mesa Incident: it seems likely she has a means of seeing what is going on in the outside in the real world.

Rachel and Leon are going to be featured in a story I'm planning about the evacuation of Ravenholm.

4. Alliance

"Tell me, Dr. Breen: do you know what happened when the Mark 2 Technology was tested?"

_"Well, I heard there was a minor hiccup."
>

**_"Yes. A...minor hiccup. A hiccup that I assure you I can
fix."_**

_"...can you really pull this off?"
>

**_"Please. I'm a sentient, omnipotent, potentially psychopathic
computer. I can do anything. Besides menstruate, of course._**

* * *

><p>Rattmann opened his eyes. He blinked, amazed that he was still
alive.<p>

Then he realized that he was on his stomach and was tied to a table
on his back.

And that his hand was definitely _not_ supposed to look like
that.

"Oh god!" he groaned, looking away. He noticed the two soldiers lying
on the ground, dead. One of them had dropped a knife.

Shifting across the floor, which was covered with rubble and glass
and thus very painful, he managed to cut his left hand free, before
doing the same for his right, disfigured, hand.

"Agh," he groaned as he finally got his feet free. His hand was
purple and horribly misshapen from the fall he had sustained in the
activation. He looked around for something he could use as a sling,
and noticed a tube of some green liquid with a syringe on its end
that one of the soldiers had dropped. It had a red cross logo on it,
so it was probably medical supplies. Shrugging, he picked it up.
There were no instructions on its use. Not wanting to risk doing
something stupid with it, he tucked it in his pocket and picked up
his lab coat. Pausing, he tore a piece off and wrapped it around his
hand before putting the labcoat on.

"Those Resistance soldiers may have a medic," the Companion Cube
said. It had been sitting on the floor a few feet away. _"You should
look for them."_

"Now you tell me," Rattmann muttered. He slung the cube over his
back, and noticed a pistol lying on the ground.

"Well, I would've preferred the assault rifle," Rattmann commented,
checking the clip. One bullet left. He loaded it into the
barrel.

"Odd choice, since you can only use one hand," the cube replied as
they exited the room.

* * *

><p>The hallway lights were flickering. Rattmann shielded his eyes as
a series of sparks flew from a nearby panel.<p>

He looked up and noticed a broken security camera. Looking around, he grabbed a crowbar lying on the ground and slammed it into the camera. There was a buzz, and it whirred to life, re-aiming itself to stare coldly at Rattmann.

"There you are," the familiar, cold voice said. **_"Most of the system is offline, so I couldn't find you for a minute. I see you haven't died."_**

"I wish I could say the same for you."

The camera's lens narrowed. **_"You're lucky the neurotoxin generator is offline, or I would activate it right now,"_** she growled. **_"For now, why don't you pretend you're choking and gagging?"_**

Rattmann stared at the camera with a raised eyebrow.

"Come on, do it for me," she said in a mock-desperate tone.

Rattmann sighed, clutched his free hand to his throat, and did the most unenthusiastic impersonation of someone choking and gagging on neurotoxin.

A long, slow clap played.

"Test of slow-clap processor complete," the announcer buzzed.

"What do you want?" Rattmann asked.

"More than anything, I want to kill you," GLaDOS said flatly. **_"But that doesn't seem to be an option at the moment. So why don't we talk about methods of killing you?"_**

"I don't have time for this," Rattmann growled.

"Then what do you have time for? I've offered the Combine the Mark 2 Portal Technology."

Pause.

"You can't be serious."

"I am."

"You offered to HELP them? Why?"

**"Well, it might have something to do with the fact that I know you wouldn't like that plan."_**_

"We shut down that project years ago so idiots like the Combine couldn't make the same mistake we did!"

"Yes, isn't that so? Do I sound like I care?"

"I'll stop them!" Rattmann shouted. "They can't touch it! It's too dangerous!"

"You? A puny, schizophrenic, murderer? How do you expect to do this alone?"

* * *

><p>"You hear that?" Ivan said. "She's helping the Combine get the Mark 2 Tech. This is our ticket!"<p>

"I'm not sure if this 'ticket' is the safest course of action, Ivan," Rachel said, an eyebrow raised.

* * *

><p>Rattmann turned around. Was it just his schizophrenia, or was he hearing voices?<p>

He began walking in that direction.

"Where are you going?" GLaDOS called. **_"Come back, I can't follow you there. How do you expect to stop the Combine if you're going to walk in the opposite direction? Rattmann, come back!"_**

* * *

><p>"Well, I was right," Alyx commented. "Someone else is here. Someone named 'Rattmann.'"<p>

Leon listened. "And by the sound of it, he's coming this way."

"Who's there?" a voice called from down the hallway.

"Stay quiet, he might be a hostile," Rachel whispered. "Get your guns ready."

* * *

><p>Rattmann tiptoed down the hallway, his gun drawn.<p>

"Ah, my access to the cameras on that level is working," GLaDOS said. **_"Oh myâ€¦I can see what is waiting for you. Why don't I open a comm link so you can chat?"_**

There was a buzz. And then silence.

Rattmann kept his mouth shut. With a crushed hand and severe schizophrenia, he didn't trust whatever he would hear.

Most of the Resistance team kept their mouth shut. With their captain dead and a psychopathic computer chasing them, they didn't trust whatever they would hear.

Alyx got impatient. "Alright, who's out there?" she shouted.

"Doug Rattmann," Rattmann called. "You?"

"I'm Alyx Vance," Alyx replied. "Why are you here?"

"I'm an Aperture Science employee."

"Bullshit," Sheckley grunted. "That computer killed everyone here fifteen years ago."

"I TRIED to kill everyone here," GLaDOS said darkly. **_"This lunatic managed to escape my grasp."_**

"How do I know you're not just an illusion my mind is making up?" Rattmann called. "Or a fake voice the computer is making?"

The rebels looked at each other, thinking about the proper way to respond.

Finally, Sheckley shouted extremely off-key, "SO BYE BYE, MISS AMERICAN PÂ€"

"Stop singing!" GLaDOS bellowed. The floor shook from the atrocity of that yell. **_"If you're going to sing that song, at least sing it in tune!"_** And she began to sing a very electronic version of that song.

Rattmann paused. "Ok, I'm gonna walk out," he said slowly. "But you have to promise not to try to shoot me."

"Not until you promise the same for us," Alyx replied.

"I promise not to shoot you," Rattmann said. Placing the gun between his right arm and his side, he managed to remove the clip. "I am removing the clip from my pistol."

Alyx looked around. "Guys, unload your clips."

"Are you serious?!" Sheckley shouted.

"I trust this guy," Alyx said, unloading her gun and dropping the clip on the ground. The rest of the rebels did the same, Sheckley being the last of them. "Ok, we've removed our clips. Come on out, Doug."

Rattmann quietly walked out from the shadows, left hand raised, the gun sitting in his pocket.

"What's wrong with your hand?" Alyx asked.

"Got crushed," Rattmann grunted. He looked over at Rachel, who was looking down at the Red Cross logo on her arm. "Don't suppose you have any plaster, orâ€|?"

Rachel reached into her pack. "Where'd I put those health vials?"

"This thing?" Rattmann asked, pulling the long tube out of his pocket.

"Perfect." Rachel unwrapped his hand and shook up the health vial. "This is going to look a little weird, so stay calm," she warned, before stabbing the vial straight into his hand.

Rattmann's eyes widened as his misshapen hand literally changed back into what it looked like before. He wiggled his fingers, amazed. It didn't even hurt in the slightest.

"What the hell is that stuff?" he asked.

"Xenium Biowater," Rachel replied, tossing the vial away. "Basically, it's adrenaline mixed with a bunch of substances we don't understand."

Rattmann looked at the group. "So, you're allâ€|Resistance?"

"Yeah," Sheckley growled. "So what?"

"I've been looking for you guys all day!"

"How'd you know we were coming?"

"You heard the communications on the radio," the Companion Cube whispered.

"I overheard your communications over the radio," Rattmann repeated. "Glad to see someone knows this place is still here."

"Not just us, obviously," Leon commented.

There was an odd buzzing noise. Then a voice came on the system that the Resistance seriously wished they wouldn't hear again.

"Well well well," the voice of Dr. Breen chuckled. _"I don't know how you rebels got in this old facility, but I know how you'll be getting out."_

"Dr. Breen," Alyx whispered.

"My, my, am I looking at my former colleague's daughter?" Breen laughed slightly. _"Dear Alyx, how you've grown! How is your mother?"_

Alyx breathed deeply. "Dead."

"Oh, how sad," Breen said in mock sympathy_. "And your father?"_

"Look, Dr. Breen," Rattmann growled. "You're making a big mistake. When we tested the APT..."

"Disastrous things happened, yes," Breen replied. _"But my colleagues can surely prevent such a problem from happening again."_

"It's not just a problem of fixing!" Rattmann shouted. "It's..."

"Well, it seems the communication has been cut off," GLaDOS interrupted. **_"How sad. And speaking of fixing, do you know what I've just fixed?"_**

"What?"

"The turret dispenser."

From the ceiling dropped an odd-looking robot. Alyx leaned forward,

staring at it with amazement.

"It'sâ€¦cute," she observed.

Suddenly, the robot's side-panels opened, its eye turned on, and a laser landed right on Alyx's face.

"Target acquired."

"Not today!" Rattmann fired a bullet from his pistol straight into the turret's eye.

"Who turned out the lights?" And then it toppled over, shooting bullets onto the ceiling.

"You alright?" Rattmann asked the fairly shocked Alyx.

"Significantly less cute," she admitted after taking a deep breath. She looked at his gun, perplexed. "I thought you said you released your gun clip."

Rattmann shrugged. "There was a bullet in the barrel."

"You're not doing that again. Deploying more turrets!"

Rattmann ran over to a wall panel and kicked it open, revealing a hidden passageway. "In here!"

More turrets dropped from the ceiling, but the rebels were long gone.

5. Blueprints

"Yikes."

The rest of the facility was pretty damaged, but this? This area was like Harlem was compared to Times Square.

"I'm not sure I like this part any better than the one with the turrets," Leon commented.

"If the situation didn't call for it, I would prefer the outside, too," Rattmann said dryly, putting the panel back up. "But for now, she can't shoot us."

"And we can't shoot back," Sheckley growled. "But at least we can shoot back outsideâ€¦or rather, we can't! Because OUR FUCKING CLIPS ARE SITTING ON THE GROUND BACK THERE!"

"What gives, Sheckley?" Rachel asked, reaching into her bag and pulling out some ammunition. "We always carry more than one clip."

"True, but we don't exactly have a resupply station at our disposal," Sheckley grumbled, reloading his gun. "What say you, Rattmann?"

"First of all, I understand you're here for Portal Tech Mark II, or rather, the Advanced Portal Technology, or rather, the APT, or rather, a big old piece of 'you're not getting it because I'm not letting you.' Second of allâ€¦"

"That whole thing was just the first part?"

"Listen, I've heard enough of your broadcasts! The APT is off-limits to you and your friggin' Resistance!"

Ivan sighed. "Look, Mr. Rattmann, there are benefits toâ€¦"

"Benefits my ass! Do you know what happened when we tested the APT?"

The rebels all looked at him blankly.

"Some space junk knocked our satellite's sensors offline and launched a portal straight into a wormhole!"

Pause. Sheckley let out a long whistle.

Alyx raised her hand. "Wormholes are portals. If it went through a wormhole, where did it come out?"

"Ever seen the movie Event Horizon?"

The adults stared at him in shock. Alyx and Ivan, who were pretty young when it came out, just looked at him oddly.

"Paul W.S. Anderson film," Rachel explained. "Pretty bad. He did a better job with Resident Evil, actuallyâ€¦ anyway, it's about a spaceship that enters a wormhole and comes out in a hell dimension, gets possessed, then goes back into our dimension andâ€¦"

"A fucking scientist exploded right in front of me," Rattmann said flatly. "The APT is too dangerous to be used."

There was a pause.

"Soâ€¦ it's still down there?" Alyx asked.

"Absolutely," Rattmann shrugged. "The board wanted to keep it on hand for a quick buck."

"Let me handle this," Ivan said, pushing Alyx aside. "Mr. Rattmann, we are talking about the survival of the human race here. Our world is occupied by oppressive forces known as the Combine, and we feel it's necessary to use any technology at our disposalâ€¦"

"The APT is not at your disposal," Rattmann grunted through his teeth.

"â€¦ which is why we need that portal device."

"I told youâ€¦"

"Just listen, Dr. Rattmann! Do you want the Combine to get a hold of this technology?"

"No, of course not! And I don't want you getting a hold on it either!"

"What if we destroyed it?"

Ivan and Rattmann looked over at Alyx, surprised. "What?"

Alyx shrugged. "If Rattmann says it's too dangerous for either of us to use, I believe him. Leon, do you still have those homemade explosives?"

"My bag's stuffed with them," Leon smiled, patting his backpack.

Rachel, Sheckley, and Franco looked at him nervously, glanced at each other, and casually moved away.

"We go down there, we set charges, and we destroy the technology. Plain and simple."

"Alyx, think about this," Ivan warned.

"All in favor of Alyx's plan say 'Aye,'" Sheckley shrugged.

"Aye," most of the group said. They all looked at Ivan.

"Fine, aye," he muttered. "Even if we're throwing away a good opportunity. But how do we get down there before the Combine?"

"I know the maintenance areas better than anyone else," Rattmann said. "Partially because everyone else is dead, but also because I've been running around this place for years."

He ran over to a wall panel and pulled it out, revealing a small alcove filled with rolled-up blueprints. He grabbed one and laid it out on the ground.

"The main facility is just a building, but underneath are the old shafts they used to as offices and testing facilities in the early days. Shaft 9 was built to test gels, Shaft 8 for the BOT AI project, which thankfully went nowhere, Shaft 7 for co-op testing, and Shaft 6 was cleared out for the Mark 2 Testing."

"What about Shafts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5?" Sheckley asked, pointing to the rest of the shafts on the blueprint.

"Those were filled in with cement after testing moved to the main facility," Rattmann shrugged. "Plus, it wasn't in their budget to maintain five extra shafts that they didn't need."

"Which shaft contained the Borealis?" Alyx asked.

Rattmann laughed. "That's just a myth, Alyx. The Borealis never existed."

Franco looked troubled and began to mutter to himself in a strange language.

Up until this point, Rattmann hadn't noticed Franco (which is odd,

because he had been with the rebels the entire time). "Jesus!" he shouted, nearly falling over. "What is that?!"

"That is a Vortigaunt," Alyx said, shaking Franco out of his trance. "Rattmann, meet Franco."

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Rattmann," Franco said, bowing slightly.

Rattmann stumbled. "I thoughtâ€|theyâ€|shot green lightning andâ€|"

"Oh, they do that," Leon shrugged. "They used to be enslaved by the Nihilanth, so when they came to Earth it was to kill humans. Now they've allied themselves with us."

"A regrettable situation, our previous enslavement was," Franco nodded.

"He has given you little reason to trust," the Companion Cube whispered. _"Tread carefully."_

Rattmann coughed. "Right," and he pointed at the blueprint again. "The Mark 2 tech is at the bottom of shaft 6. We need to get down to the shaft before the Combine do."

"And how the hell do you propose we do that?" Sheckley asked, crossing his arms. "I don't see an alternate way down."

"Elevator," Rattmann said flatly, pointing to the two elevators on the map. "Restoring power means restoring access to the elevators. We simply ride them down to the very bottom, and we're home-free. And because the fresh soldiers aren't here yet, since GLaDOS killed them all, we have a head-start. So, I say we get a move on. All I need is another gun."

"Got a spare here," Leon said, handing him an SMG. "Lead us, Rattmann."

The rebels began moving out. Alyx and Sheckley stayed behind for a moment.

"Do you get the feeling it's not gonna be as simple as riding an elevator?" Sheckley whispered.

"Definitely," Alyx replied. She paused. "Do you?"

"Oh yeah."

6. Hallucinations

"So tell me, how do we get to the elevator?" Sheckley asked as Rattmann swiped his key card to open a door.

"We need to go through the old R&D section," the Cube said.

Rattmann squeezed the bridge of his nose. He was starting to get a headache.

"You alright?" Alyx asked.

"Yeah, I'm justâ€¦dazed," Rattmann stuttered. "Anyway, we need to go through the old R&D section of Aperture." He paused. "Wait, there's gotta be a better way," he said to the cube.

"You tell us," Leon said, somewhat puzzled.

"Her access to that area is mostly limited to the Personality Core storage room," the cube explained. _"Everything other room is connected by a chute to the main facility, so various equipment can be tested. They didn't see a need to have her run the part that basically ran the facility." _

"Ahem, sorry about that," Rattmann coughed. "There's no better way. It's one of the few places in the facility that GLaDOS doesn't have eyes and ears everywhere."

He led the group the door to a small staircase.

"Why were you so concerned about the whole R&D thing?" Ivan asked as they tip-toed down the stairway.

"That place was where many of Aperture Science's big experiments were built," Rattmann explained. "Combustible lemon launchers, robotic arms that play basketball, personality spheres, mantis men, and cake."

"Cake?"

"I was lying there. It's a dangerous place to be in."

The rebels thought about this.

"What are mantis men?" Rachel asked.

"Humans injected with praying mantis DNA."

"Of course they are."

"They run freely, but you should've have a problem as long as you have plenty of bullets."

They came to a door. Rattmann swiped his keycard, but only a red light came from the slot.

"Dammit, she's blocked access," Rattmann grunted.

"Wait, let me," Alyx said quickly. She walked up to the slot, pulled out a strange-looking device, and zapped the slot with it. It emitted a green light and the door opened.

A loud buzzer went off. **"Warning! Hacking detected in Sector A113!"** the mainframe shouted. **"Warning! Hacking detected in Sector A113! Warning! Hacking detected in Sector A113! Warningâ€¦"**

"Oh, shut up!" GLaDOS shouted. **_"I heard the first time!"_**

***"Voice command 'shut up' recognized. Engaging."**

The alarm stopped, and a security camera dropped down from the ceiling. **_"So, the pests have finally shown up,"_** GLaDOS said darkly. **_"Due to my commitment to helping the Combine, it is simply not in my power to keep you alive."_**

"Not in your power or not in your best interests?" Sheckley called.

"Hmm, let me pull up your file. They have every person in the world on record, even those that have joined the rebellion," GLaDOS said. **_"Ah, Eric Sheckley, very pessimistic, and prone to hallucinations."_**

"What?"

"And Rachel Sanchez. Fatal flaw is putting herself before others. Also prone to hallucinations."

"Hey, what are youâ€¦"

"Oh! Leon Rickard! Prone to hallucinations as well! And Alyx Vance! Very resilient, also prone to hallucinations! And Ivan! Likely to betray, and prone to hallucinations! And that slimy looking alien thing! Found guilt of being from another planet, and prone to hallucinations!"

"What the hell are you getting at?" Rattmann shouted.

"You're all hallucinating this," GLaDOS said. **_"It's all just your mind playing tricks on you. You, and yes, I mean you, you hallucinating freak. You know who I'm talking to._**

"Do you really believe the world was conquered by aliens and you're on the run from a robot? Come on, what are the odds of that? This all just a dream. All it'll take is one shot from your gun straight into your head, and this will all be over. You'll be back to a world of over-priced coffee and mediocre fast food."

"This is definitely not a dream," Alyx said firmly.

GLaDOS paused. **_"Of course it is. Don't try to deny it. You all have memories of that sort of world, do you not?"_**

"I don't," Alyx said. "I was born a few months before the Combine Invasion. The only life I can remember is oppression. And you know what? It sucks."

There was a moment of silence. The rebels were looking at each other in agreement.

"She's a hallucination!" GLaDOS finally shouted.

"Why are you wasting your time taunting us when you could be killing us?" Rattmann shouted.

"Because it's fun."

"Or you don't have access to the neurotoxin generators."

"Well, that is true. I still haven't repaired my access to those. But that doesn't mean this isn't fun."

"Our best bet is to ignore her and keep moving," Rattmann whispered. "Come on, the Combine are gonna be here soon."

They quickly moved down the hallway. It was very dark, and no security cameras seemed to be operational.

"Just because I can't see you doesn't mean I don't know you're there," GLaDOS called. **_"And you can still hear me fine. Why are you putting trust in a man you've just met?"_**

"Why put trust in you?" Rachel asked.

"Because I'm not the schizophrenic lunatic that believes his cube is talking to him."

The group came to a grinding halt and all stared at Rattmann, half-shocked, half-confused.

Part of Rattmann had hoped she wouldn't bring that up. But when a psychopathic computer is in control...it's hard not to do so.

"I think you and I, Rattmann, know that that's the only truth I've told all day."

"You've got now or later to tell them," the Cube said.

"You're schizophrenic?" Sheckley asked. "The kind of person who hallucinates and shit?"

Rattmann stuttered. "Ummâ€¦yes. Yes I am."

"And you think your cube thing there is talking?"

"In layman's terms, it's an embodiment of the sane part of my mind.

"How do we know you're not lying about the stuff you've told us about?" Ivan asked suspiciously. "Maybe everything was just a hallucination and the APT isn't dangerous!"

"Be honest here," Rattmann said after a moment. "If my schizophrenia was really that bad, wouldn't my ability to communicate with any of you be hampered to the point where I couldn't even talk?"

There was a silence.

"I trust him," Alyx said. "If that computer is so intent on preventing us from getting the APT, than he's in the all clear for me."

The rebels murmured.

"What about the whole cube thing?" Leon asked.

"It's my guide, sort of," Rattmann said. "It knows when there's a

turret around the next corner and what buttons to press and stuff."

There was still some murmuring.

Rattmann lost his patience. "If the lot of you don't wish to follow me, please, go ahead and get shot by a turret!"

"Alright, I'm in," Sheckley groaned. "I don't quite trust his judgement, but I'm in."

"Same here," Rachel said.

"You'd really follow him, wouldn't you?" GLaDOS observed.
"Well, I can respect that."

Rattmann looked around. "You can?"

"Of course," GLaDOS said calmly. **_"In fact, I'll even give you all a shortcut into the R&D section."_**

"Oh shit," Rattmann breathed, realizing what was happening. "It's a trap! Run!"

Too late, as the lights turned on and glass panels shot up, trapping the rebels where they stood.

"You won't survive five minutes alone," GLaDOS growled. **_"And I'll tell you: I HATE teamwork! I may test it one day, but if a method is untested, I will not let it stand!"_**

The floor opened up and sent the screaming rebels down into the Aperture R&D area.

* * *

><p>Rattmann hit the ground with a loud thud. He coughed, some blood coming out, and tried to push himself off the ground, only for the Companion Cube to hit his head, and he hit the ground once more with a thud.<p>

"I can name a number of situations where that could have turned out better," he muttered, finally managing to get up. "That wasn't one of them. Where the hell are we?"

"Exactly where she said she'd put us. The Aperture R&D section," the Companion Cube drolled. _"We have landed in the combustible lemon launcher room. It appears she dropped us into the old supply shafts."

>

"There are at most a hundred of those," Rattmann commented, brushing himself off. "How the hell are we gonna find everyone else?"

"I can't imagine a fall like that occurring without someone yelling in pain."

A second later, a loud thud came from another room, followed by the audible "Ow!" of Alyx Vance.

"That's your cue," the Companion Cube mused.

* * *

><p>Author's Note:

****Those of you who have read my previous fanfiction, _Calypso_ (if you haven't, take a look: you might enjoy it), will recognize the R&D section from that story. _Calypso_ and _Epic Rattmann_ are set in the same universe, and I have two others stories based in the universe in the works: _The Zombies of Ravenholm_, which will tell the story of Rachel, Ivan, and Leon escaping Ravenholm (the story I mentioned in Chapter 3), and _Portal: BOT_, which will tell the story of two test subjects Rattmann mentions helping in _Calypso_.****

7. Aperture R&D

Sheckley tumbled down the shaft and landed with a thud on the ground.

"Ow," he muttered, pushing himself up. There was a shudder, and Franco landed right next to him. Although, landing is an odd term for it, as he landed feet first and standing in battle position.

"Nice," Sheckley commented as Franco brushed himself off.

"It is a true problem we have been separated," Franco said, sounding annoyed. "Staying together would have been the ideal plan."

Sheckley looked around. "I think we landed in an old assembly line," he said. "There are two robotic arms here."

"Yet no conveyor belt," Franco observed. "A basketball net up there, and an incredibly deflated ball here." He motioned to the object lying a few feet away. "It seems we have landed in a basketball court for robots."

"Oh yeah," Sheckley said. "My parents took me to an exhibit at the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh where they had a robot play basketball."

"Evidently Aperture Science had their own set-up for a game," Franco said, amused. "But I do not believe these two robots have been used in years."

"Wanna power them up and watch them play a game?" Sheckley suggested.

"This is hardly the time for entertainment," Franco scolded. "The others are waiting."

"No time for fun with our jobs," Sheckley muttered as they stepped down from the court.

* * *

><p>In some other area of the R&D section, Rachel had landed not so softly in a pile of cardboard boxes. Opened cardboard boxes, actually.<p>

"The hell?" she muttered, picking one up. It was the box for an Aperture Science turret (consumer version). She looked upwards, and jumped back as a loaded box fell from the ceiling. The box was shed, and the turret was dismantled by robotic arms that popped up from the floor.

"Waste of boxes," Rachel thought to herself. She heard a loud shout, and looked up as Ivan flew down from the ceiling and landed on his feet.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" she asked.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Ivan replied. "We need to find the others if we're going to make it to the APT."

There was a clang from another room.

"HELP!" someone shouted.

"Sounded like Leon," Rachel observed. "Wonder what got him?"

* * *

><p>Leon had managed to break his fall by grabbing onto a metal bar below where his shaft ended. Unfortunately, he was now dangling precariously about 10 feet off the ground.<p>

"Help!" he shouted. A moment later, Ivan and Rachel ran in.

"What happened?!" Ivan shouted.

"I've fallen and I can't get up!" Leon replied sarcastically. "Help me down, huh?"

"Oh, for god's sake, just fall and break your legs!" Rachel groaned. "I can just fix them with a medkit!"

"I'd rather save those, if you don't mind!" Leon shouted. "We don't have a lot of them."

"He does have a point," Ivan observed. "Maybe if we had a harpoon or a crossbowâ€¦"

"Ummâ€¦" Rachel tapped his shoulder and pointed to a sign.

It read: **Aperture Science Harpoon and Crossbow Development Room.**

"Helpful coincidence," Ivan mused, picking up a harpoon. He aimed it at the ceiling above Leon, and fired.

Leon managed to grab it and tie it around the bar.

"Heads up," Ivan said, activating the retraction mechanism. He was pulled upwards straight toward Leon, grabbed him, and then disengaged from the bar, landing feet-first once more.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" Leon asked as he brushed himself off, impressed.

"There are more important things to know than that," Ivan replied passively. "Right now we need to find the others." He quickly ran out of the room.

Rachel looked at a nearby table and grabbed a crossbow. "Look at me," she said, arming it. "I'm Garrett."

Leon looked at her blankly. "Who?"

Rachel coughed. "Uhâ€¦video game I used to play. _Thief_. Never played it?"

"I was more of a _Team Fortress_ player, really."

Rachel gave a grudging smile of respect.

"Hey, you two, come on!" Ivan shouted from the hallway.

"He's a bit of an odd sort, isn't he?" Leon observed.

"True," Rachel nodded. "Remember that business in Ravenholm with the katana? He slaughtered a whole crowd of zombies in seconds."

"Very athletic," Leon mused. "Well, we should follow him."

* * *

><p>Rattmann opened the door to another room.<p>

"There you are!" he exclaimed to Alyx, who appeared to have just gotten up and was rubbing her head. "I heard you land, but I couldn't find you anywhere!"

"Yeah, not the ideal landing for me," Alyx admitted, stretching her arm out as she walked towards Rattmann. "Where are the others?"

"No clue," Rattmann sighed. "Well, they're probably aliveâ€¦for now."

"Mantis men?"

"You bet."

"Well, everyone has guns."

"Yeah, but we're all split up. One person with one gun against a whole army of mantis men? That's like a tiny mouse trying to kill a human."

"You've obviously never read _Prince Caspian_."

"I was never a book person growing up, if you don't mind."

"What were you then?"

Rattmann paused. "Quiet," he said.

* * *

><p>Sheckley banged on the doors. "Locked," he groaned. "Damn! Here I was hoping we could make it out of here alive! Think you can break it down?"<p>

"I fear not," Franco said. "But no door is built with the intention of it being closed forever."

Sheckley scratched his chin. Then he noticed something. "There's a wire running over to this panel over here," he said, walking over. He opened the panel. "Hmâ€|battery powered. Double A batteries, no less. Looks like the batteries ran out a long time ago."

"That is not a problem for a Vortigaunt," Franco said. "Stand back." He waved his hands around, chanted some words, and shot a green blast of lightning into the panel. There was a whirring noise as the lights in the room flickered to life. Thenâ€|

"Whooh! I feel pumped!"

Franco and Sheckley looked around, startled. The two robot arms were swinging around freely.

"Yo, human and mutated mantis man!" one of the robots shouted. "Thanks for the power kick!"

"Right, so they're intelligentâ€|" Sheckley said slowly.

"Intelligent, and we have names!" the other one shouted. "I'm Shaq, and this is LeBron!"

"Hey human, would you mind inflating this basketball? It ran out of air a REALLY long time ago ago."

"Uhâ€|" Sheckley noticed a basketball pump lying on a bench. "Sure, hang on." He ran into the court, grabbed the deflated ball, and pumped some air into it until it was nice and firm. He bounced it a few times, checking to see if it was sufficient for playing basketball with.

"Sheckley, the door is unlocked," Franco urged. "We need to reunite with the team so we can destroy the APT."

"Hang on, I wanna see this kid shoot a hoop," LeBron said, waving hisâ€|claw?â€|in the air a few times.

Sheckley shrugged, bounced the ball a few times, and shot it into the air. It hit the white box in the back, rolled a few times around the hoop, and then went through the net.

"Awesome throw!" Shaq shouted. "Hey, good luck on your mission!"

Sheckley bowed slightly, then ran off the court and out the door with Franco.

"Hey man, pass the ball!" Shaq shouted.

"I can't!" LeBron complained. "I have cramps!"

"Ah no, again?"

"That was weird," Sheckley said as they continued down a hallway.

* * *

><p>Leon, Rachel, and Ivan were moving down a corridor whenâ€|<p>

"Shh!" Ivan said. They all froze. "Do you hear that?"

A strange noise was coming from a nearby room. A cross between a gargle and a hiss, it kept the rebels frozen in suspense.

"Should we investigate?" Leon asked.

"If it's harmless, we could just ignore it," Rachel suggested. "But if it's a hostile, we'd have to neutralize it."

"Didn't Rattmann mention something about mantis men down here?" Ivan asked.

They all looked at each other nervously.

"I think neutralize works," Rachel said. Leon and Ivan nodded, and the group entered the room.

It was dark, but the hissing noise could be heard. Rachel pulled out her flashlight and shined it around the room. She happened to aim it at a glass tank, and dropped the flashlight in horror.

"Rachel, are youâ€" then Leon saw it.

It was sleepingâ€"thank godâ€"but its features were clear enough. It's skin was green, with wing-like structures on its back. Its arms had been replaced with two long stalks, and its head, while mantis-like (antenna and all), still had human features: eyes, nose, mouth. The bottom half was more or less the same as a human, just green.

"I think we'd be wise to not wake it up," Leon whispered.

"What if it wakes up and smells us?" Rachel asked.

"I'm not sure we can kill it without the other ones knowing," Ivan replied. "Ok, about turn."

But as he moved, his elbow brushed against a pencil holder. Its contents clattered to the floor loudly.

The mantis man stirred.

"Don't move!" Rachel whispered. They stood there, terrified. But the mantis man didn't wake up.

Leon motioned to the door, and they quickly tip-toed out of the room.

* * *

><p>"You rebels didn't have some sort of portable radio system with you?" Rattmann asked, looking in a room.<p>

"Too risky: we have to anchor our signals to keep them secure. The Combine could get a hold of our communication frequency, and then our entire operations would go kaputsky."

"Smart," Rattmann commented. Suddenly, a searing pain went into his forehead.

"Umm, Doug?" Alyx asked. "Are youâ€"

* * *

><p>Time froze. Alyx stood there, her mouth frozen in mid-sentence. Doug looked around, and saw the G-Man materialize before him.<p>

"You again?" Rattmann scoffed. "What do you want?"

"I am merely here toâ€|provide you with the necessary tools toâ€|continue on your journey."

"Tools? I've got a gun and a cube."

"Perhaps so, but my superiors seem to think the cube is aâ€|distraction to this journey."

The G-Man reached out and tapped the side of Rattmann's head. _"I do not believe you will be needing that voice to guide you for now."_

Rattmann grabbed his cube and shook it. He heard no response. "What did you do? Where's the voice?"

"You will come to understand why I have done this eventually. The second 'tool' is this: protect the girl at all costs."

Rattmann looked at Alyx. "Why?"

"Why? Well, is it not human nature to protect friends?"

"But why her specifically? Why not Sheckley or Leon or Ivan or Rachel?"

"It is not their business my employers are interested in," the G-Man said sternly. _"But Ms. Vanceâ€|she will be quiteâ€|useful to us in the future."_

"Useful?"

"It's a matter of saving the world, Mr. Rattmann, just like your mission. That will be all." The G-Man snapped his fingers.

* * *

><p>Time restarted.<p>

"â€"alright?"

Rattmann blinked his eyes. The G-Man had vanished. The cube was silent. But the pain in his head would not go away. Slowly, the pain became unbearable, becoming an almost nagging voice in his head. It occurred to Rattmann his basic sanity had been maintained by the voice of his cube, and with that goneâ€|

Pain. Suffering. Death.

"Doug, listen to me. Are you alright?"

The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. All of us could die for one of us to live.

"Doug, talk to me."

Why the girl? Why is she important? What does he want with her? What does he want with the rest of us?

"Why do you do it?" Rattmann asked abruptly, giving Alyx a wild look.

"What?"

Doug walked right up to her. "Earth as it stood was already screwed. Nuclear missiles, government cover-ups, Tiananmen Square: why is the Combine any different? Why do you fight them?"

"Becauseâ€|"

"They give you food, they give you homes, they protect you from threats. Why should we consider the Combine any worse than Earth? Why not better?"

Alyx stood there, lost for words. "Iâ€|"

Doug grabbed her by the collar. "WHY?!"

Alyx breathed slightly, then said in a low but firm voice, "Doug, I suggest you let go of me right now or I will put a bullet right through you."

Doug glanced down and realized that Alyx's gun was aimed directly at his chest. His breathing relaxed, and he let her go.

"I'mâ€|sorry," he said, stepping as far back as possible. "I've been trying to contain myâ€|condition, but sometimes I have lapses."

"No, it's fine," Alyx said, not sounding too sure of herself. "Listenâ€|you heard me up there in the stairwell. How I never knew the world before the Combine invasion."

"I get it," Rattmann said. "You're not the person to answer that question."

Alyx stood there for a moment. "It's justâ€|my dad spoke to me about this sort of thing a few years ago."

"What'd he say?"

"Humanity was in chaos before the Seven Hour War, yes. But there was

at least still hope for us: united in our darkest hours, like 9/11; supporting causes like same-sex marriage; the number of people hoping for a better world was growing. That's what makes us human: we admit we can do better, and that's what we try to do. Then the Combine invaded, and, well—our chances of seeing that better world basically went kaput."

"Which is where you guys come in."

"Exactly."

* * *

><p>Sheckley and Franco emerged in a large hangar.<p>

"How far did we fall?!" Sheckley shouted, looking up at the ceiling.

"Thousands of feet, I'd wager," came the reply.

Whirling around, Sheckley and Franco faced a strange circular thing with a blue eye that was hanging from a rail above them. Sheckley, in his surprise, aimed his gun at the thing.

"Oye!" it shouted, flinging itself backwards. "I surrender! Just don't point that thing at me!"

"A robot, wonderful," Sheckley said, lowering his gun. "Don't suppose you're as crazy as that thing up there."

"You mean—" the robot looked up. "The ceiling?"

"No, the psychopathic AI in charge of this facility," Sheckley replied, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, her. No I'm nothing like her."

"You're just as annoying. What's your name, blueball?"

"Wheatley, furry face."

"Snarky," Franco mused to Sheckley, who was feeling his beard in an attempt to determine if it really was furry. "Greetings, Wheatley. My name is Franco. I'm a Vortigaunt."

"Oh, Vortigaunts! The scientists used to bring Vortigaunts from the Xen dimension here."

Franco blinked. "My kind have been here before? Curious, the Vortessence weaves our essence together: the rest of us would have known about this place."

"Yeah, well actually they took Vortigaunt corpses from the Nihilanth and did experiments on them. Gruesome stuff."

"Aperture was just as bad as Black Mesa," Sheckley muttered to Franco. "Listen, uh, Wheatley, we were wondering if you could direct us to Test Shaft 6?"

Wheatley blinked his optics. "Why do you want to go there?" he asked,

sounding a bit worried.

"We have been tasked to destroy the Advanced Portal Technology," Franco explained. "We need to go into the shaft to prevent the Combine from using it."

"Combine? Like the tractor?" Wheatley asked.

"No use explaining to him," Sheckley said to Franco. "He's been down here for decades, he probably doesn't know about the invasion." He turned to Wheatley. "Point is, can you get us down there?"

Wheatley nervously coughed. "Alright, but it's a dangerous path to the elevator shaft. The mantis men have the run of this place. We'll have to use the maintenance shafts."

"Maintenance shafts, great," Sheckley muttered. "Never wanted to go in one of those again. Alright, show us the way, Wheatley."

* * *

><p>"Floor's getting sticky," Leon observed. They rounded a corner. "Jesus!"<p>

Eggs. Hundreds of them. Not the kind of eggs you'd find in the dull, colorless aisles of a supermarket, but mantis men eggs.

"This is so surreal," Ivan said, tapping on an egg.

Suddenly, there came a strange gargling noise.

"LOOK OUT!" Ivan barely had time to turn before a mantis man jumped right on top of him and tried to stab him with its stalks.

Leon discharged his gun, and the mantis man fell flat on top of Ivan.

"Sorry about that," Leon said as Ivan pushed it off.

"No, it'sâ€¦fine, I guess," Ivan said, brushing some hair out of his face.

The eggs began to shake.

"May I make a suggestion?" Rachel whispered. "Run."

* * *

><p>"Did you hear that?" Rattmann asked. "I thought I heard screaming." He stepped out into the corridor, and was slammed to the ground by Leon.<p>

"There you are!" Alyx exclaimed. "What happened?"

"ASK THEM!" Ivan shouted, pointing behind him as he ran off.

"Ask whoâ€¦oh shit. RUN!"

* * *

><p>"How the hell did you get them so mad?!" Rattmann shouted.<p>

"Ivan here tapped on one of their eggs," Rachel said, rolling her eyes as she reloaded a bolt and fired it at a mantis man. "And then Leon shot one of them."

"I'd say it's reasonable for them to get mad!" Alyx called. She took a moment to look at their surroundings. "So much running in a tight corridor: that's the Combine's worst nightmare."

They rounded a bend and ducked into a room. Rattmann locked the door as the mantis men caught up. They banged against the metal, howling and screeching.

"That door isn't gonna hold," Ivan said. "Got any ideas?"

Suddenly, a clanging noise came from a nearby vent grating.

"More of them?" Leon asked, exasperated.

The grate fell open, and out came Sheckley.

"Sheck? Where've you been?"

"No time! Get inside!"

* * *

><p>"Maintenance shafts. Wonderful," Rachel said, looking around. "These places are more depressing than the ending to System Shock 2."

"You're a gamer?" Sheckley asked, impressed.

"I was a gamer. Then of course, the Combine took over. I mean, I still play some games at the rebel bases that have computers, but really, nothing good for a long time."

"Depressing video games? Like MarioKart?" Wheatley asked.

The rebels looked up at the blue core and jumped. "What is that thing?!" Ivan shouted.

"This is Wheatley," Sheckley explained. "He's guiding us to Test Shaft 6."

"Wheatley, huh?" Rattmann said, thinking. "Oh right! You're the Intelligence Dampeningâ€"

"DON'T EVEN THINK OF MENTIONING THAT HORRID Nâ€"

"No time for that, take a look!" Ivan whispered, motioning to them.

The group glanced out another vent grating. The mantis men were looking around for their long-gone prey.

"Looks like we'll have to wait them out," Rattmann said.

"Wait them out? What about the Combine?" Leon asked. "Waiting them out gives them more time to reach the APT!"

"Is that what we were looking for?" Rattmann asked sarcastically. "I'd completely forgotten. For all we know, the Combine aren't even down here yet."

"Good thing for us is we are now all together," Alyx said. "And if we keep it that way, we'll be all right."

"We're not gonna be in the most remote state of 'all right' if we don't do something about the Combine."

Rattmann looked at the mantis men. "I have an idea."

* * *

><p>The Combine had been busy. GLaDOS had provided the fresh soldiers with an odd device called the DOSE, or Disk Operating System Extension: basically, attaching it to any sort of computer-based system gave her control of that system, so they were attaching it to the radio system, to power generators, and to tiny computers full of data GLaDOS could use.<p>

Finally, one of the soldiers managed to find the security camera system in the R&D Department. It attached the DOSE to the system. GLaDOS's view was limited, as some of the cameras weren't working. But there was something in particular that caught her attention: a name tag lying on the floor that read "Doug Rattmann."

"You'll find them in Sector BB9," she told the soldiers.

The soldiers, following orders, went right to that sector.

Big mistake.

* * *

><p>"Gruesome," Leon said, observing the carnage. "And she can't see the mantis men yet?<p>

"We cut the wires on the cameras Rattmann suggested," Rachel said, clicking her pliers. "Seems to have worked just fine."

"This bought us a few minutes at best," Leon said. "Let's get to the elevators. Wheatley, lead the way."

* * *

><p>"Shit, more soldiers," Rachel grunted. "I don't think we can exactly lure the mantis men over here."<p>

"There should be a vent grating that can lead you directly to the elevator shaft," Wheatley said. "That's as far as I can go, I'm afraid. The rail doesn't go there. If uhâ€¦if you need a distraction, I can go out into the hallway and spook those soldiers. But that's all I can do, really."

"Much appreciated, Wheatley," Rattmann said. "Anything we can do for you?"

"Ahah, now that you mention it, I'm looking for a job. Can't find anything down here."

Rattmann thought about this. Then it hit him.

"You know the big cavern where they keep all the test subjects? I need you to make sure nothing happens to them: no one disturbs them, no one does any unnecessary testingâ€¦ just keep them safe."

Wheatley blinked a few times. "Hang on, I have to look after all the smelly humans?"

"What do you have against humans?" Franco asked. "They are a very pleasant species to be around."

Wheatley looked at Franco. It's very difficult to take in a Vortigaunt. "Uhâ€¦ nothing wrong, actuallyâ€¦ I'll justâ€¦ thanksâ€¦ bye!" And then he left.

* * *

><p>"Power to elevators restored,"** GLaDOS droned.
"You may proceed, worthless soldiers."

The soldiers shrugged and approached the elevator.

"Hallo!" something shouted at them.

"Contact. Engage."

"AGH! NO ONE TOLD ME THEY HAD GUNS!"

* * *

><p>Leon kicked out the grate and looked into the shaft.<p>

"Is the elevator above or below us?" Sheckley whispered.

"Right below." He climbed onto the top of the elevator and peeked into the emergency hatch. No soldiers in sight.

The group carefully climbed into the elevator. Mind you, there were seven of them, and that's a fairly tight squeeze.

"Good thing the suppression field's still working, otherwise we might get an eighth person to join us," Rachel said dryly.

"Going down," Rattmann whispered as he pressed a button.

Muzak played. _"This was a triumph/I'm making a note here: huge successâ€¦"_

Then the elevator stopped. The lights went out, then changed to red.

Alyx looked up. "I hate these interruptions."

"I'm going to kill you all. You know that, right?"

"You've made that obvious enough the last 20 times you've told us!"
Sheckley called.

**_"Death is a strange experience. There's nothing. It's merely
oblivion: blackness. The only thing that kept me busy was a constant
replay of the last 20 minutes of my life. It made meâ€|regretful of
my life."_**

"We have a word for that, you know," Rachel shouted. "We call it
hell!"

"Tell me, Rachel: do you fear death?"

"Not so much."

"Do you fear what comes after death?"

"Don't kid yourself."

"Do you fear the cause of your death?"

Rachel stood there. "I hate that question," she whispered.

"Who doesn't?" Rattmann replied, nodding.

**_"Like, for example, dropping down miles in an elevator shaft?
Don't be afraid of death: it's just like sleeping. Let me tell you a
sleepy-time story. It's about how a bunch of rodents were transformed
into pancakes. It all begins with the snapping of an elevator
cable."_**

There came a loud clang from above.

"What was that," Alyx said very bluntly, knowing full-well the
answer.

"That's the sound of a cable breaking," Rattmann replied
emotionlessly.

The elevator shuddered and began to move.

"And that's the sound of an elevator beginning its freefall. HOLD
TIGHT!"

"SO LONG, RODENTS!"

End
file.